

CIA 8-01

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More Questions About the CIA

Hearings in the House Rules Committee are reviving the old argument about how much supervision of the Central Intelligence Agency should be assumed by Congress.

In 1956 Senator Richard Russell of Georgia told his colleagues, "It almost chills the marrow of a man" to hear about the clandestine activities of the CIA that, as Secretary of State Rusk said, are performed in "dark back alleys." A score of representatives are sponsoring bills to bring the agency under closer congressional surveillance. They want a joint committee to replace separate House and Senate subcommittees that now perform a cursory role.

The major obstacle to such a review is secrecy, and the advocating congressmen are quick to concede that this is a vital consideration. They point out, however, that a full-time committee staffed with professionals could operate more secretly than does the present setup, and that, besides, there never has been a whisper of indiscretion on the part of members of the joint committee on atomic energy.

On the other side of the debate are members of Congress who doubt that a joint committee could improve the situation without actually intruding on policy judgments that belong in the CIA and to the Executive Department. They question, for example, whether the CIA role in the Bay of Pigs disaster—if the agency had a role—could have been changed under closer surveillance.

Almost certainly the Rules Committee will reject the joint committee plan, just as it has done in the past. But just as certainly the issue will persist, and the questions will continue to be asked. That they are asked is, in a sense, a measure of control over the CIA and a proper expression of appropriate concern for a democratic society.